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ABSTRACT

The authors report on findings from a questionnaire on the education of gifted students in Florida completed by 226 superintendents, administrators, and teachers (elementary and secondary). Among findings are that counselors, psychologists, and classroom teachers were the staff principally involved in screening of referral; school psychologists were the most frequently named professional in placement staffing followed by counselors and parents; the county program administrator was most frequently named as evaluator of gifted programs; the majority of gifted students in the participants' schools were assigned to enrichment classes part time; no single theoretical orientation predominated; creative/productive thinking was the curricular emphasis most frequently noted, followed by general intellectual ability, leadership, and specific academic aptitude; and areas identified as most in need of change included attitudes of educators toward gifted education, teacher preparation, and guidance and counseling of the gifted. (CL)

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EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED IN FLORIDA

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FOREWARD

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We have in the past published special research bulletins in addition to the usual quarterly bulletins when such research materials comes to our attention.

Occasionally we find some very interesting research which has meaning and worth to our member districts which needs to be disseminated but which is not usually of the size or/and scope of our regular bulletins. We, therefore, choose to call them occasional papers.

The education of the Gifted has been defined as "A Many Splintered Thing" by some of its critics.

Drs' Brown, Cain, and Ms. Bittner have taken a look at the education of the Gifted in Florida, and this paper will give you the results of their findings.

Those interested in the education of the Gifted will no doubt find this research informative, perhaps it will serve the purpose of providing an information base from which will spring needed attention to this intriguing area.

Spring, 1979-80

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EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED IN FLORIDA

Robert B. Cain, Barbara N. Bittner,
and Robert G. Brown

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The state of Florida has a continuing commitment to provide a broad based educational experience for all its citizens and has assumed a national leadership role in the area of gifted student education. In 1976, Florida Atlantic University, one of nine state universities, chose research and development in the field of gifted, talented, and creative student education as the mission for its campus laboratory school, The Alexander D. Henderson University School. A group of faculty from other departments of the university whose interests also include education of the gifted met in the Fall of 1978 to discuss current practices, attitudes, and the needs of professional educators in Florida.[1] The group decided it should develop an instrument specifically to assess: identification methods, placement procedures, curricular emphases, philosophical bases, evaluation procedures, and priorities for the future.

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1 The group consisted of Mrs. Barbara N. Bittner, Director, Alexander D. Henderson University School, Dr. Robert G. Brown, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Robert B. Cain, Assistant Dean, Continuing Education, Dr. Betty Chaney, Assistant Professor of Early Childhood, Dr. Lucy Guglielmino, Consultant in Self Directed Learning, Dr. John C. Munson, Director, Computer Systems, Dr. Jeffrey Schilit, Department Head, Exceptional Child Education, and Ms. Sally Youngs, University School Instructor.

PROCEDURES

Population In Florida each of the 67 counties forms a school district with a superintendent and director of exceptional student education. The entire population of superintendents, district directors of exceptional student education, and coordinators of gifted education, as well as a representative sample of elementary and secondary principals and elementary and secondary teachers of the gifted were surveyed. Responses across and among counties of varying sizes indicated a sufficiently representative group of respondents associated with gifted education in Florida to draw tentative inferences. (See Table I)

Table I

RESPONDENTS BY DISTRICT SIZE

TITLES	SUBJECTS TOTALS	LARGE COUNTY			MEDIUM SIZED COUNTY			SMALL COUNTY		
		Sent	Rec'd	%	Sent	Rec'd	%	Sent	Rec'd	%
Superintendents	67	10	3	30%	11	4	36%	46	14	30%
Directors	67	10	4	40%	11	5	45%	46	21	45.6%
Coordinators	18	10	6	60%	6	6	100%	2	2	100%
Elementary Principals	150	86	31	36%	40	16	40%	25	9	36%
Secondary Principals	62	38	17	44%	4	1	25%	18	7	38.8%
Elementary Teachers	150	86	28	32%	40	11	27.5%	25	13	52%
Secondary Teachers	62	38	20	52%	4	1	25%	18	5	27%
TOTALS:										
Sent	578	278	109	39%	116	44	37%	180	71	39%
Received	226									
Percent of Return	39%									

Method The group developed a draft of a questionnaire to examine each of the areas indicated in the education of the gifted. One series of questions dealt with details of the current practices in the state: screening, evaluation staffing, and dismissal from gifted programs. A second series sought information on program organization, theoretical bases, curricular emphases, and evaluation procedures. A third series asked for opinions regarding contemporary issues including teacher preparation, early identification and placement, program organization, and needs for the future. The preliminary instrument was then critically reviewed by the State Consultant, Gifted Education, a group of county program coordinators, and teachers from south Florida. The researchers felt that construct validity was sufficient considering purposes and time limitations. A revised form, "Florida Statewide Needs Assessment Questionnaire: Education of the Gifted," was completed and distributed to the research population in the late Spring of 1979.

Analysis The analysis compared the responses of seven categories of educators from counties of varying size to 14 questions having 72 possible responses. The data were analyzed by a standard Sperry Univac package developed for the social sciences which yielded coefficients of concordance by various measures. The level of confidence was set at $P < .05$ which served as the criterion basis from which comparisons were made among the various subgroups of teachers and administrators and between the total administrator and teacher group as well as small, medium, and large counties.

DISCUSSION/FINDINGS

The numerous variables and their permutations produced such an inordinately large amount of data, only that seen as most salient and economical will be reported. Many of the findings were relatively straightforward whereas others, less axiomatic, invite the researchers to offer an explanation. The researchers,

in turn, invite the reader to assign their own significance to these questions, and it is herein that, perhaps, the greatest value is to be derived from this undertaking.

The instrument was developed and administered late in the school year, yet those professional workers who received them were quick to complete the forms and return them to the researchers. This observation was taken to suggest that Florida educators have a keen interest in education of the gifted. Another initial observation was that the responses came from areas having programs throughout Florida; therefore, it could be said that the above interest and/or enthusiasm was reflected statewide, in large, small, and medium sized counties. Another initial observation was that among the multiplicity of categories of responses there were only eight instances of significant disagreement among respondents.

Gifted Student Identification, Placement, and Dismissal With regard to the question of who participates in preliminary identification procedures, it was found that counselors, psychologists, and classroom teachers (as differentiated from teachers of the gifted) were those principally involved in screening for referral.

The most nominated professional worker participating in evaluation staffing for placement was clearly the school psychologist. This finding is not surprising, but it does raise the question of whether criteria of giftedness, apart from the expertise of the school psychologist might be subordinated in this process. Counselors and parents were next noted as participants in the placement process. This confirms the legal requirement of parent permission for placement in any exceptional child program. Principals, teachers of the gifted, classroom teachers, and district administrators were noted as also involved in the process. A discrepancy was found between administrators and teachers: administrators saw

the classroom teacher and the district administrator as participants in evaluation staffing significantly more than did teachers as a group. Teachers are unquestionably participants in matters of evaluation staffing, yet their responses suggest there is a question in the minds of some as to their potency or as to the consistency by which their views are solicited. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated their preference for dual placement when a student met the criteria for more than one exceptionality.

As for dismissal from gifted programs, nearly all administrators and teachers agreed that the recommendation of parents and/or teachers of the gifted were the primary determinants. More than 72% of those responding indicated that an annual review of the IEP was also an important factor in determining dismissal. The influence of classroom teachers and gifted students themselves, however, was not as pronounced as the other three factors. Whereas the rest of the respondents saw the teacher as involved in the dismissal process, teachers saw themselves as less significantly involved.

Evaluation of Programs for the Gifted With reference to those who evaluate gifted programs, the modal response was the county program administrator. A smaller majority felt that the school based administrator also evaluates programs. A discrepancy emerged, however, related to the questionnaire option regarding whether the teacher of the gifted is involved in program evaluation. Administrators by a 2:1 ratio felt that teachers of the gifted do, in fact, evaluate programs, but teachers were evenly divided on this question. The majority of negative responses came from elementary teachers. Apparently many elementary teachers of the gifted do not feel that they participate in gifted program evaluation. Very few from either group felt that other county administrators or outside consultants participate in gifted program evaluation.

Existing Programs for the Gifted One way of examining programs is to look at the methods by which the gifted are accommodated. Methods included in the questionnaire were: full and part-time special classes, enrichment, acceleration, projects, advanced placement, ability grouping, pairing with a mentor, tracking, summer programs, and after school and Saturday programs. Responses confirmed that the majority of students were assigned to enrichment classes, part-time. Though about half the respondents recognized the use of projects, it was evident that all other vehicles of accommodation were rarely utilized.

Another way of looking at programs is to examine their theoretical orientation. From a variety of choices including current theoretical trends, it was observed that no single orientation predominated. A little over half of the subjects responded that the work of Torrence (creativity) and Guilford/Meeker (Structure of the Intellect) were significantly reflected in their programs. Whereas one might expect to observe universal recognition of Bloom (Taxonomy) the actual finding was that only half reported that this orientation was indigenous to their programs in a significant way. The works of Williams (CAI Model) and Renzulli (Triad Model) were the least frequently reported.

While respondents indicated that their programs reflected a philosophical/theoretical orientation, the failure to identify a single focus raised some questions. At this time in relation to the state of sophistication in the education of the gifted, it is reasonable that Florida educators might reflect an eclectic view regarding theoretical contributions. One would question, why were not all orientation options highly chosen when none reflected theoretical incompatabilities, and each is well represented in national research literature? The data reflects that no orientation is represented in any more than half of Florida's programs for the gifted.

When a program has been developed with theoretical comprehensiveness one can expect to find authentic relationships between ends and means. If one agrees that theory is the most practical of all things; that theory gives impetus to engage in purposive action; that theory is the essence of education for the gifted, then certainly the question of the relative sophistication of Florida's educators in theoretical/philosophical matters is one worthy of closer scrutiny.

A third way of looking at programs is to examine the curricular emphasis. Creative/productive thinking was the most frequently noted. General intellectual ability was second in terms of "great emphasis." Regarding leadership and specific academic aptitude, the characteristic response was, "some emphasis."

Elementary and secondary school programs for the gifted in Florida require IEP's. The researchers were interested in getting an indication of the perceived "value" of these required plans. Both teacher and administrative groups presented a majority view that IEP's are necessary; however, it was noted that a significant difference existed between the administrator/teacher groups. Superintendents, directors, and principals were in high agreement regarding the necessity of IEP's. High school teachers' responses were equally divided, followed by coordinators and elementary teachers, those persons most directly responsible for the design and implementation of IEP's.

The reader is left to assign his own significance to these findings, yet it is an area of reported agreement wherein the minority view may present the most significant import.

Program Preferences Administrators and teachers in Florida were in clear agreement that gifted students are best served in special classes (enrichment centers, magnet schools, etc.). Though some administrators felt that main-

streaming with enrichment in standard classes was viable, teachers did not favor mainstreaming. There was unanimity that advanced placement programs, community based programs, and standard classes with no special program were not suitable alternatives.

When the above is considered along with the findings reported earlier that special classes, i.e. enrichment classes, part-time in nature were the modal method of accommodating the gifted, one is then left to conclude that Florida educators have stated a preference for programs as they exist. Less concordance would have reflected a broader view of available or practicable alternatives.

Another item on the questionnaire referred to the matter of when formal training should begin. Though the respondents were divided, more than half felt formal education should begin before the age of five.

Administrators and teachers demonstrated high agreement in both degree and focus of spending of hypothetical additional funding. Concerning the seven choices presented and the degree of spending on each, the subjects preferred that additional funds be spent on program development and expansion. This preference was followed by materials, field experiences, and next by teacher training. Responses were divided on additional expenditures for identification/diagnosis, additional teachers, and research. Nearly all respondents were in agreement that additional monies need not be spent for para-professionals to work with the gifted.

Perceived Priorities The final item gave the research population an opportunity to choose among twelve foci on needs for change in the 1980's and beyond. Respondents were asked to rate each stated need on a four-part continuum from "most need for change" to "no need." Each stated need received a majority of positive responses, but some were differentiated as being more clearly

desirable.

Those identified as areas where change is most needed were: attitudes of educators toward gifted education, the preparation of teachers, curriculum development, and guidance and counseling of the gifted. In-service preparation, criteria, evaluation, and funding for gifted programs received a rating in the second highest category of needed change. There was a final category of items which received a predominant rating of "little need" for change. These items were: criteria of giftedness, identification techniques, parent/community involvement, coordination of efforts at the local, county, and state levels, and community awareness. Only in one of the above categories was there a difference noted between administrator and teacher groups, and that difference was the criteria of giftedness. Proportionately more teachers than administrators saw a need for change in the criteria of giftedness.

Regarding the matter of teacher preparation, a need is apparently recognized, though the extent and focus of this need cannot be appraised from these data. At a time when teacher certification in the area of gifted education is on the horizon, one could hope that the specific interests and needs of teachers in this regard will be closely appraised.

Another observation worthy of note came in the area of inservice preparation of teachers. First, the research population was asked if there is an in-service program available to teachers in their areas. All groups noted that there were such programs. Later, the subjects were asked about "need for change." Inservice preparation was again mentioned as an area of consideration. The responses pointed to an overwhelming need for change in this area. Apparently, there is provision for inservice programs, but there is an overall dissatisfaction with the present implementation, delivery system, and/or content.

CONCLUSION

Florida educators of the gifted have demonstrated their professional attitude toward their role and have openly reported to these researchers their views regarding policies, procedures, strengths, and deficiencies of existing programs. Those directions for change most noted were those which are not so costly in dollars as they are in time, effort, and reorganization. The researchers recognize that there are areas touched upon obliquely which will require further research in order to assign more direct significance; however, they are happy to have provided this opportunity for each group of professional workers to relate to the whole picture at one time, and express their individual views and suggestions.

FLORIDA EDUCATIONAL

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